

Was Rachel Carson a Mass Murderer?

A new issue of one of my favorite magazines, *Extra!* is hitting the streets, with a blurb for my article inside on the cover. When I decided to get into political journalism, *Extra!* was the first magazine I turned to. Every other month they issue a brilliant magazine full of articles which collect and dissect the standard media narratives on a particular issue and then lay out the real story for you. It's invaluable. I think of their work as a good digest of the news: you get the same misinformation you'd get everywhere else but you also get how and why it's misinformation.

For my first piece, I decided to take on the noise machine that's been loudly proclaiming in news outlets across the land that the environmentalist movement, headed by Rachel Carson, is responsible for the deaths of millions of African babies. Why? Because they discouraged the use of the noxious pesticide DDT, which was previously used for controlling the spread of malaria.

For the article, I dug into the science, interviewed the man behind the misinformation campaign (Roger Bate, a character straight out of *Thank You For Smoking*), and corrected claims from right-wing think tanks (no, Rachel Carson did not kill all those babies) and from blogs (no, the whole misinformation campaign is not funded by the tobacco companies).

You can read the full article [on *Extra!*'s website](#) or I've put up [a version linking to all my sources](#).

An interesting footnote: As I noted above, Roger Bate insisted he had not been funded by the tobacco companies, as many have claimed. Instead, he said, their main original funder was the [May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust](#). The trust, a \$264 million California foundation started by a mining magnate, has the mission of "provid[ing] grants to organizations that serve the needs of children, the elderly, the disabled, and the disadvantaged." However, it has also been a major contributor to the libertarian Cato Institute and George Mason University. Bate says that its trustee, Luther Avery, didn't "agree entirely with everything I was suggesting" but at least thought "the debate was worthy of being exposed."

In 2001, Luther Avery passed away, leaving his \$400,000 a year trustee job to his son, Mark Avery, making Mark the fifth highest-paid foundation executive in the Bay Area ([San Francisco Business Times, 11/14/03](#)). But apparently that wasn't enough — Avery stole \$52 million from the Foundation and fled to Alaska. ([San Francisco Chronicle, 6/10/07](#)). This June he pled guilty and now he faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. ([U.S. Attorney for Alaska, 3/6/07](#))

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